Chapter – 3

Double Vision

Like tides, we are ebbing with the flow, flowing with the ebb we think we know. (Anon)

Anything which is singular captures attraction. For instance, the singular grace and beauty of a building, draws our interest. But nothing is singular in a metaphorical sense, because there is always the flip side. Ramanujan shows both the head and tail in his portrayal of life. A.K. Ramanujan self-mockingly describes his position as ‘being the hyphen in Indian-American’, a term that unfolds the central principle governing his creative universe. In his seminal essay “Parables and commonplaces”, Ramanujan praises E.M. Foster for having produced literary works out of disconnections. Like Foster, T.S. Eliot says in “The Waste Land” that he could connect nothing. Ramanujan too does the same thing in a limited way. In his poem, “Connect”, he says:

Connect connect cries my disconnecting
madness, resembling phrases,
father whispers in my ear, black holes
and white noise, elections with four year
shadows, red eclipses
and the statistics of rape, connect
connect, beasts with monks, slaves economics
and the golden bough. (178)

Multiplicity, whether linguistic, cultural or social seems to have been Ramanujan’s focus of interest. He has dwelt quite graphically on this aspect of his growing up in his essay titled “Telling Tales”.

As we grew up, Sanskrit and English were our father tongues and Tamil and Kannada our mother tongues. The father tongues distanced us from our mothers, from our own childhood, and from our villages and many of our neighbours in the cowherd colony next door. And the mother tongues united us with them….Sanskrit stood for the Indian past, English for colonial India and the West….each was another to the others, and it became the business of a lifetime for some of us to keep the dialogues and quarrels alive among these three and to make something of them. (Ramanujan A.K 449-50)

Thus the four language formula, Sanskrit, English, Tamil and Kannada got reduced to a three language system and Ramanujan felt at ease with these languages. However, with regard to his vision of life, the poet does not have many worlds but only two, the inner and the outer
world. Bruce King refers to Ramanujan’s ability to live peacefully in two different worlds, “the world of his self and memory which is ‘within’ him and the world of the present which is ‘without’ and explains that the core of the essential self remains as an inner world, but this is modified by changed circumstances and decisions” (215).

A.K. Ramanujan himself supports this view when he says that one cannot entirely live in the past. Similarly, one cannot entirely live in the present, because the past never passes, either the individual past or the historical past or cultural past. It is always with us. It is the past experience which gives one the richness of understanding the present and of expressing the same in the chosen language.

To express it in the words of E. N. Lall, “Ramanujan’s poems take their origin in a mind that is simultaneously Indian and Western -- In dian mode of experiencing an emotion and the western mode of defining it” (44). As a third world expatriate poet, Ramanujan, unlike his western counterparts who have lost ethical values, hails from a social background which is noted for its familial bonds, communal and religious harmony. Wherever he went he had carried with him his cultural roots from India and therefore his works do not contain elements of existential rootlessness.

As Ramanujan was aware of the sharp difference between the enriching culture and tradition of India and the west, his sense of
nostalgia got intensified with passing years. Therefore, in his works the
readers are driven to juxtapose the “Spiritual community-oriented,
tolerant value system of India and the materialistic, individualistic, racist,
power-hungry exploitative system of the west” (Kirpa 15). Infact, this
juxtaposition feel that the white man has no superiority. If he is supposed
to have it, then it is a meaningless myth. And hence, the poet goes back
with renewed spirit and vigour to his people and his country. A major
theme of Ramanujan’s poetry has been his obsession with the familial
and racial past and memory which always plays a vital and creative role
in his words.

He grew up in a traditional middle class Southern Hindu Brahmin
family. The formative influence of religion provided, helped him to know
the meaning of life. He retained his faith in the Hindu philosophy of
Unity Consciousness. His acceptance of the oneness of all life is evident
in his poem “Christmas”:

For a moment, I no
longer know
leaf from parrot
or branch from root
nor, for that matter
that tree
from you or me. (30-31)
The man, the tree, the parrot possess identical creative impulses. And therefore they are considered as expressions of the same erective force. The western tradition accepts God as the creator of the universe. Yet it seems to maintain the distance between Man, and natural beings. To poets like Robert Frost, the objects of nature, how ever closer they may be to the life of man, cannot become ‘the man’. But in the eastern culture, there is oneness. There is no double vision. Even if there is a difference, it is considered to be the other side of the same coin.

This kind of difference between the oriental and occidental traditions is also emphasized further through the tree image in the same poem. The bare leafless tree standing outside his window in the USA and the lively tree seen out of his window in India which is more than a mere “stiff geometrical shape” are images that bring to his mind the two different cultures. After his death the poet desires to “rise in the sap of trees” and feel the weight of honey - hives in the branches and the effect of weaver-birds in his fair. The oneness of life could be illustrated through the example of the sap. Though the sap itself is a colourless pigment, it produces all colours and all colours contribute to into one creative source.

Ramanujan is not blind to certain superstitious beliefs of his religion. The Hindu principle of non-violence sometimes reminds of cowardice to the poet who has lived in a country which is known for
rationality, dynamism, fast scientific and technological growth and violence. However it is presumed that the principle of non-violence may degenerate into callousness and indifference in actual practice. As the Hindu is not expected to hurt a fly or a spider, his great grandfather appeared to be a helpless victim of and silent spectator to the adultery committed by his wife. (“The Hindu: He Doesn’t Hurt a fly or a Spider either”). In his poem “Obituary” Ramanujan recalls his father’s death, and comments ironically on rituals and ceremonies associated with the cremation of the dead.

In “Love Poem for a Wife I”, Ramanujan, in a mock - serious vein digs at those Hindus who engage themselves in making arrangements for child betrothal even during the gestation period. He states:

forestalling separate horoscopes
and mother’s first periods,
and wed us in the oral cradle
and carry marriage into
the namelessness of childhoods . (67)

Incidentally, he also refers to the Egyptians who felt that

…………………………………
their kings had sisters for queens
to continue the incest
of childhood into marriage.(67)
What he means is, marital traditions differ from nation to nation based on the culture. Some cultures seem to be acceptable while other cultures, like the Egyptian culture of marrying one’s sister or brother among kings, appear strange to the poet. However, he comes to a conclusion that the institution of marriage is not God-made but man-made. And that accounts for individual variation and preferences.

As an expatriate writer, Ramanujan is a ‘teacher’ and he does not revolt against his society like the western counterpart. The revolutionary zeal which is seen in the poetry of the West like those of Shelley and Byron and the humanistic attitude or the social inclination and commitment that are observed in their poetry are totally missing in him. Expatriation has not caused any setback in his growth as an artist because he has not lost touch with his mother country. The mother figure also remains as a dominant figure.

Ramanujan’s expatriate feeling includes an objective and accurate portrayal of both countries - particularly the native country. In his poem “A River” he gives graphic details about the nature of the river and the condition of the bridge across it and so on. While many poets, both the past and the present sang only about the floods and thereby presented a romantic and idealistic picture. They identified and acknowledged the river as a creative force initiating life on earth. Ramanujan offers information about the other side of the picture too by explaining the
destructive nature of water. While admitting that the river in Madurai “has water enough / to be poetic / about only once a year” (39), he is alive to the fact that

it carries away
in the first half-hour
three village houses
a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda
and one pregnant woman
expecting identical twins
with no mole on their bodies
with different coloured diapers
to tell them apart.(39)

The river is both a preserver and destroyer. The poet points out the havoc caused by floods and drought suggested by the “sand ribs”. The poets portrayal is contrary to the poetic myth - making tendency of Tamil poets who ignored reality and the poem itself. Bruce King remarks that; the whole poem is an attempt to debunk the romanticization of traditional Tamil culture. (210)

Indian culture is forcefully riverine. A river is not only a romantic symbol of refulgent life. It forms the very hub of local culture. It brings into play the dynamics of culture that thrives along its banks. Ramanujan
draws small pictures of river that runs through the native landscape. His portrayal of river is very different from another Indian English poet R. Parthasarathy. In Ramanujan’s native landscape every summer a river dries to a trickle in the sand baring the sand ribs. It is also clogged by straw and women’s hair at the rusty bars. In contrast to Ramanujan’s river R. Parthasarathy’s river is filled with stale flowers. Thus if in Parthasarathy’s poetry the river represents decadence, in Ramanujan’s poetry, it becomes destructive too. The double vision of the river is, once a year it is full. It appears poetic. But it carries away village houses, cows and a pregnant woman too. River as a symbol of nativity and nation does no longer sustain life. During summers, it stinks, and during rainy season it overflows ominously to swallow the whole range of life on and around its shores. Perhaps, the poet wants to convey the truth that the ways of nature are uncontrollable and unbearable. This sort of understanding that man is powerful but nature is all powerful is very essential in the analysis of the twin nature of human life and natural objects.

In the poetic sensibility of A. K. Ramanujan, we find a combination of the East and the West - the inner world of his Indian heritage and experience and the objectivity and accuracy of the Western poetic tradition. Ramanujan’s memory is sharp but his vision of Indian society is comprehensive. Therefore he cannot be called a nostalgic traditionalist. Eventhough he was alive to the western mode of
expression, changes and attitudes, we cannot conclude that he accepted them fully and advocated modernisation and westernization. Ramanujan’poetry entails include nostalgia, inwardness, and documentary realism. But there is no idealization. The vision does not become dark inspite of the ironic and satiric tone.

Life holds various types of fear. For instance poem “Entries for a catalogue of Fears” records various images of fear, the old fear of depths and heights, the fear of the father in the bed room, the fear of a helpless father of the men in line/behind my daughter” and so on. The old man is proud of being sixty talking now and then of God and finding reason to be fair everywhere.

Like a typical Hindu who is aware of the role of the ‘stitaprajna’ the man takes a subdued stance:

See karma

in the fall of a tubercular sparrow,

in the news paper deaths in Burma

of seventy-one men, women and children;

actually see the one in the many,

losing a life time of double vision

with one small adjustment

of glasses. (87)
Initially the speaker is objective about the happenings of the world. But deep within him he is death-conscious and is secretly disturbed by the “crematory fire” and “vultures”. The lines

Not being dead

as a tree under wood-

peckers plucking

out worms like nerves; with just enough

left to know (88)

not only imply implies the death consciousness but also project the existential angst and sense of waste. The last part of the poem takes him back-with an ironical tone of self-defeat to the refuge shown by the “twisted black-bone tree” – the house, which to a Hindu, is a myth where he would become the continuing symbol of the ancient chaos of a country by doing everything that a typical head of the Indian family has been doing:

I’ll love my children

without end

and do them infinite harm

staying on the roof

a peeping-tom ghost

looking for all sorts of proof

for the presence of the past. (89)
The self deception found in these lines is a common stereotype of Hindu attitude to life which is further outlined in poems dealing with the Hindu ethos. They are: “The Hindoo: he does not Hurt a Fly, or a Spider either,” “The Hindoo: he reads his Gita and is calm at all events,” “The Hindoo-the only Risk” and “Prayers to Lord Murughan.” In the poem “Christmas” which is included in the first volume “The Striders,” the past through an evocative statement underlines the essential difference between oriental and occidental cultures, The Hindu poems are in a way critical to many aspects of Hindu heritage. At the same time they state observations in favour of Hindusim. In other words he denigrates and glorifies. This seemingly incongruous approaches found in his poetry are related to the predicament in actual life, for he appears to be “someone caught in the cross fire between the elemental pulls of his native culture and aggressive compulsion of Chicago milieu”. (89)

In his poem “Snakes” he records his experience of snake-worship at home in India. It is stated:

A basketful of ritual cobras
comes into the tame little hour,
their brown – wheat glister ringed with ripples.
They lick the room with their bodies, curves
uncurling, writing a sibilant alphabet of panic
on my floor. Mother gives the milk
in saucers. She watches them suck
and bare the black-line design
etched on the brass of the saucer (4)

Later he recalls the encounter with the snake while coming back to
his home in America. He writes:

The clicks hood heel suddenly strikes
and slushs on a snake: I see him turn,
the green white on his belly
measured by bluish nodes, a water-bleached lotus stalk
plucked by a landsman hand. Yet panic rusher
my body to my feet, my spasms wring
and drain his fear and mine. I leave him sealed,
a flat-head whiteness on a stain.

Now

Frogs can hop upon the sausage rope,
Flies in the sun will mob the look in his eyes,
And I can walk through the woods. (5)

The speaker thus has left the snake sealed. And he coolly walks
through the wood. And he shows no sign of regret about killing the snake
which Hindus worship. Here he comes close to the Judo –Christian
tradition. The snake in the Old Testament is equated with Satan. It is true
the cobra was the totem animal of Dravidian clan in India. And cobra is
worshipped even today by the people in South India. Appearance of the snakes is considered as symbolising the presence of Lord Murughan. The difference between science and art is, the former is factual, and therefore it is ever fixed in time and space. Wherever the facts are and whoever deals with facts, there is only one answer. Scientific truth never thus varies. But a poem is inconclusive in nature. It is open-ended in nature. There are many interpretations as there are many people to view a poem with a difference. But the efficacy of a poem is that it always gives something valid and feasible to every interpreter depending upon his aesthetics. So the double vision in general contains many points of view. But specifically it might refer to any two observations according to the context of the poem.

Apart from Vishnu’s man-like form, Indian myths portray Vishnu as the cosmic serpent. Inspite of these traditional concepts regarding snakes, he kills the snake. He does not show any twinge of regret. However he convinces his regards that he has extricated himself from his native cultural values, and has performed something that is closer to the western mythology. But even in the West there are poems like “Snake” by D.H.Lawrence which underlines the poet’s admiration for the snake. So it is not that the West always detests snakes.

Ramanujan’s Mythology poems differentiate the reality of the myth with that of his real self. In first two poems he tries to capture myth
which is a thing of the past to show the continuity of his own self from the past to the present. He also incorporates into these poems a prayer motif. A true Hindu, at least at the far end of his life expresses his willingness to be united with the divine. This underlying pattern is very much implicit in the prayer motif.

In his Mythology poem, he refers to Krishna and Putana myth. Kansa, the notorious king and uncle of Krishna, sends Putana to feed baby Krishna from her poison-coated nipple to kill him. But the divine baby envisages the heinous conspiracy and puts an end to her life. The poet’s precise depiction is remarkable:

The child took her breast
in his mouth and sucked it right out of her chest.
her carcass stretched from north to south.
She changed, undone by grace,
from deadly mother to happy demon,
found life in death. (221)

To be killed by God is to realize salvation. So the demon is at once happy to be dead to experience a new life for it is purged off all demonic qualities. The poet’s humble prayer is, therefore, significant. This life has injected all poison into the poet’s self. Hence he is willing to be resurrected in order to begin a new life leading to salvation.

O Terror with a baby face,
suck me dry. Drink my venom.

Renew my breath. (221)

In the second poem, the poet recalls the myth of Lord Vishnu who destroyed the tyrannical king Hiranya Kashyapu, the atheistic father of Prahlad, the devotee of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu, in order to prove his omnipresence and to protect his devotee and his faith, appeared from the concrete pillar of the palace, in a half-man-half-lion shape and tore off the king, keeping him on his knees at the threshold. The poet earnestly prays to God:

Connoisseur of negatives and assassin
of certitudes, slay now my faith in double.
end my commerce with bat and night
owl. Adjust my single eye, rainbow bubble,
so I too may see all things double. (226)

The poet epitomizes his faith in Vishnu and he alludes to his maturing vision with which he can see the inner and the outer side of life. In other words he requests the Almighty to educate him to contrast between the mythical and the real. It is his observation that though the mythical faith is different from the scientific facts, somehow, they are interdependent. While science deals with cognitive facts, religion deals with behavioral or emotional quotient. Science plays within the boundary with regards to experiments and evidences, but religion plays beyond the
boundary. However both are interconnected. If science deals with the external factors, religion describes the internal make-up of a being. Therefore, Ramanujan foregrounds the thoughts of myths in his poems.

Prayers assume the condition of humility. They express the poet’s devotional integrity. In his poem ‘Death and the Good Citizen’, Ramanujan discloses layers of his Hindu mind. It is through this process that the poet establishes the concept of a nation and asserts his identity as an Indian. The poet compares between the two kinds of funeral rites. The one is eastern and the other is western and the privileges of one over the other. Those privileges bear testimony to his Indian identity. Yet he says:

But

you know my tribe, incarnate
unbelievers in bodies
they’ll speak proverbs, contest
my will, against such degradation.
Hidebound, even worms cannot
have me: they’ll cremate
me in Sanskrit and sandalwood,
have me sterilized
to a scatter of ash. (136)

Through myths, rites and rituals Ramanujan reveals his cultural identity which adds to his the national identity. In spite of the importance
of the “outer forms,” Ramanujan holds on to the supremacy of the “inner substance” which impels him to relate himself to India in a meaningful way so that he could overcome the burdens of alienation. He identifies the distinction between a real American citizen and himself:

My tissue will never graft,
will never know newsprint,
never grow in a culture,
or be mould and compost
for jasmine, eggplant
and the unearthly perfection
of municipal oranges. (136)

This view of Ramanujan could also be traced to Sujata Bhatt’s poem ‘The One who Goes Away’. The poet writes:

I am the one
who always goes
away with my home
which can only stay inside
in my blood-my home which does not fit
with any geography. (20)

Sujata Bhatt’s closeness to one’s home is similar to Ramanujan’s idea of home and self. Ramanujan therefore, elicits a new perspective in which both the self at the centre and the periphery to which the self often
returns to an area of equal significance particularly because of the symbiotic relationship that exists between them, complement each other. Preferring one to the other would point out the imbalance between Ramanujan’s “inner” and “outer” forms. In Ramanujan’s poetry, Chirantan Kulshreshtha observes,

> passivity becomes an essential precondition for suggesting the inexhaustible potential of the self.

> It is a positive state of being which allows the self the necessary freedom and transparence to manipulate subjective and linear time, use personae, being the equations of one’s relationship into a vivid focus, and even observe itself as an object. (170)

Ramanujan’s poetry holds reference to the Hindu or the Indian milieu. But the entire corpus of his poetry should be studied from the perspective of the symbiosis of the outer and the inner substances. Surjit S. Dulai rightly points this view when he writes:

> While it is certainly true that Ramanujan’s harking back to Indian experience has always played a fundamental role in the shaping of his poetic sensibility and the content of his poetry, as a whole his poetry embraces realities extending far beyond the boundaries of his antive land. His poetry is born out of the dialectical interplay his Indian and American
experience on the one hand and that between his sense of his self and all experience on the other) Its substance is both Indian and Western. Starting from the centre of his of self and his Indian experience, his poetry executes circles comprehending ever-wider realities, yet maintaining a perfectly taut connection between its constant, and continuously evolving, central vision and the expanding scene before it….Ramanujan’s poetry neither stays in one place nor leaves, its vision remaining constant and the circle of this vision constantly growing. (151)

Ramanujan achieves objectivity in poetry. It is on account of his long stay in Chicago. It is also due to his insightful awareness of his native culture. It was true that Chicago physically distanced him from South India and because of his distancing created awareness in him to look into his forgotten Indian experiences with coolness, and objectivity. So, even though he refers to his familial past, the poet’s tone remains unsentimental. He looks at his past as if he views an album of photographs after long years. Thus, if one tries to look at the self objectively, a work of art which is created by the self becomes an objective artifact. Therefore, in the case of Ramanujan, all his achievements were due to interaction, absorption and synthesis of two cultures, that is, the East and the West. Thus the integration of two forms
of substances, that is the inner and the outer forms the theme of his vision. Just as the form and meaning of a poem are intertwined in Ramanujan’s poetry the inscape and the landscape become mutually absorbed, complemented and enriched.

“Poona Train Window” is one poem that can be described exclusively as a poem of ‘the outer landscape’. Ramanujan seems to suffer from an extreme fear of being in a small confined place. His inner self or inner landscape appears to be affected by this strange unpleasant feeling of being alone from the busy outer world. Though, he keeps himself away from the outer reality, he looks at it with a help of a window which is ever present in his inner self. To observe the external world from the restricted inner world is not an intimate act of survival. In fact, the poet has not acquired a third eye. It’s through a window which the poet persona peeps at the human carnival. Thus a window in a moving train gives a full length ‘peep show’ to the curious persona. The first image that comes through his mobile window screen is that of “a man defecating between two rocks, and a crow”. Ramanujan looks beyond as he observes a whole range of scenery outside:

The blinding noise

and the after hush

of one train passing.

Another, rise and fall
of hills in two sets
of windows, faces, a rush
of whole children, white
hair in a red turban.
I drink my railway tea.
Three women with baskets
on their heads, climbing
slowly against the slope
of a hill, one of them
lop-sided, balancing
between the slope and
the basket on the head
a late pregnancy. (80-81)

The rural women lives a life of burden and its shown in three aspects. First they go to the hilly regions to collect fuel and fodder; second they carry all their collection on their heads; and third, they have to manage their pregnancy problem along with other burdens. On looking the common status of women, the poet criticizes his native landscape and its people; especially the affected women. Their economic status worries him all the more. At the same time he loves his country and the people. Ramanujan’s approach towards his home is this simultaneous play of joy
and sorrow, love and hate, emotional intimacy and intellectual withdrawal, glorification and criticism.

In his later poetry, we find the simultaneous presence of Chicago and India in a relationship which is at best contrapuntal. In a contrapuntal relationship, much effort is taken to give emphasis to what is silent or marginally present. To put it differently, standing on the shores of the external self, the internal is observed. Similarly, the internal landscape of the mind shows keen interest in absorbing what is taking place externally. Both Chicago and Indian scenes bring out the strengths and weaknesses of the other, establishing the truth that there are some who always feel that the grass is greener on the other side. Every nation or every depiction has two sides. Therefore no one country or exposure is superior to the other.

In “Chicago Zen”, Himalaya River and Lake Michigan are locked against each other. Chicago traffic with a deluge of “orange” headlights gives the poet a “vision of forest fires”, which in turn reminds him of the Himalayan “rapid” river which is silent.

You fall into vision of forest fires,
enter a fronting Himalayan river
rapid silent
on the 14th floor
lake Michigan crawls and crawls
in the window. Your thumbnail

cracks a lobster louse on the windowpane. (186)

When he was in America, the poet tried to negotiate his estrangement through two ways, firstly by imagining Indian equivalents among things or situations which appear foreign, and secondly by juxtaposing them with alien landscape. Chicago traffic lights are compared to a rapid Himalayan river which is then contrasted with the calm and still Lake Michigan. Such equivalences or contrasts may sound impossible or farfetched in their nature. But they finally help the poet to bring the two cultures in a single frame. However, the poet’s self gets tensed. This tension enables him to treat his Indian experience with an objectivity and detachment. In a review of Ramanujan’s “The Striders” Harriet Zinnes remarks:

Although Mr. Ramanujan writes frequently about his Childhood Indian experience and thus flavours the poems with images of fig trees, mynahs, snakes, Madurai, a Delhi Sundial, he completely western in his language, diction and attitude towards the object.(qtd in Rao 121)

Nizzim Ezekiel also points out the same trait in his poetry in his review of “Relations.” The poet reads his passion as if it is a newspaper report about a turmoil in a distant country. (43)
Ezekiel remarks that Ramanujan’s poetry is Indian. Yet it lacks the vibration of Indian poetry. It does not have the typical flavours of Indian poetry. Being influenced by the Tamil classical poets, Ramanujan wrote depersonalized poetry. However, it does not contain any cold objectivity. In all his memory poems, he fuses the subjective and objective aspects of life and presents the same as a single poetic experience.

The poem “The Difference” can be studied in terms of juxtaposition of two time structures the communal and the private, the objective and the subjective. Subjective or private time has its specific priorities and preferences. If community spends its most important time in shaping the divine figures out of clay and straw, the queer individual spends the same time in shaping his toys. In the first part of the poem, the poet describes the routine of traditional craftsman:

It’s with leftovers they make horses, toys;
life scenes of women
pounding rice with lifted pestles;
boys; or a drummer girl playing
with both hands
the two-headed drum for two dancers
with long brazen necks, long legs, long hands,
arrested in a whirl (171-172)
In the second part of the poem, the order of preference or the time-schedule is reversed. The collective poet persona, tries to uphold a holistic mission. The narrator says:

Do my dancers first
jet bombers
and tiny Taj Mahals for tourists
these days, then come through pestles,
women,
and horses to the gods who will bake
only if time permits, if there’s metal left,
and desire
or if my children’s quarrels need new gods (172)

The implication is all in the game and eternity is no more than “a rumoured beat of his extraordinary heart” (173).

“Two Styles in Love” is another poem which draws its basic structure from juxtaposition between two scale of values love.. In the first part of the poem, love is sudden and fast;

Love, you are green only to grow yellow.
circling sickles in the wind will reap
your ghost from the branching gallows.
you will need no help to get to the heap.
come, the blatant sky is breaking into frost.
Eunuch shine is on the rain. The hidden
dog star sniffs at the peeping toms, and night will be sudden:
Your once face, found in a rush of nettles, will be lost. (11)

In the second part, love is slow and it “takes time to kill the frost.”
The first type of love is full of “shell-less” youthfulness, for it does not
‘grow’ steadily over a period of time. It is a fairytale love. Another style
of love has no such inner “burning” in order to overwhelm the lover:
“Love is no hurry, love is no burning”. Even changing phases of moon do
not let the physical desires overflow: “Moon may turn at the full; we
return without turning”. The last stanza of the poem brings out the
‘patient’ dynamics of this style of love thus:

No, no love is sudden.
Coupling hands take time to kill the frost.
even leaping Beast shall wait to be hidden
by beauty. Come lightly, love, let us want-to be found,
to be lost. (11)

The second type of lover believes that “only growing has gold to
reap.” The poem as a whole remains as an excellent example of double
movement or vision or time which characterizes Ramanujan’s poetry.

Time during night is different from time during day. During the
night the frozen images of time begin to flow and they start haunting our
consciousness. In a poem “Night’s Day”, the poet brings forth the
fundamental qualitative difference between time during day and time during night. During night,

In sleep cripples dance
deafmutes cross-examine the mafia
and cats play hide and seek
with speckled goldfish.(261)

The concept of sleep in Ramanujan’s nocturnal world does not denote passivity. Sleep is akin to state of discharging feverish activities: “I wake as if/sleep was work” (261). During day when one is wide awake, the situation is different. In a state of

waking, dancers need crutches
deafmutes and eunuchs
in mafia harems
and piranhas savour cats’ flesh.(261)

Night, in general, is the time of wish-fulfillment. It is during night that people reveal their true colours, during day people put on a mask. They camouflage. Night offers a perspective which is more vibrant and fresh than the so-called clear vision of daylight. During night Ramanujan re-visits the site of a dead cow which is found lying in the pool of blood. (82) He wants to see how it died under the gaslight. But to his surprise he discovers a sight which is much more life-like under the gas light:

A violet shadow
all around a dead
or dying cow
and you come
back at night to see
how it looks
under the gaslight,
and after an accident,

blood
looks remarkably
like fresh paint (82)

Gas light is not a substitute of daylight. It is only its model. It lends
a perfect backdrop to night’s exoticism. Thus it adds grandeur to the
mysteries of night.

Ramanujan does not perceive dawn as negation of the darkness of
night. The troubles that affect consciousness during the dead of the night,
take deadly dimensions at the time of daybreak. Instead of enjoying dawn
as something new, the poet looks upon it as an extension of night itself.
What is found silently in the darkness of night becomes visible at the
stroke of the dawn:

Doubts grow in the dark
and by dawn the window
is tangled in vines.
scaffoldings grid the steeple
when time’s work is done.
Moss grows on the bark
of the oak, wrinkles on a brow,
as men explode stepping on mines. (199)

Dawn is not a platform to resolve one’s worries. It does not console
the fatigued self. The window which acts as the poet persona’s skyscraper
at one level gives him a peep into the outer objective world. But at
another level, it restricts the broadness of his vision to a limited a scale.

Postmodernism is said to be the conspicuous feature of the West. The East stands for dharma which summarises its essential culture. To negotiate a homespun concept with that of the postmodernist approach to life, it is difficult for any writer. But for Ramanujan, the problem is almost severe. Being an expatriate Indian writer he has been shunting among three phases. One is the inherited and ‘filiative’ space of religion. Another is the equally possessive native space of Tamil and Kannada-region, and yet another the acquired and ‘affiliative’ postmodernist space of Chicago. The dissimilar frames intrude upon the creative imagination of a displaced modern writer in a manner which is far more dangerous than is usually expected. Kunwar Narain, a contemporary poet of new Hindi poetry, explains the dialogic dynamics of the encounter:
The pressures of an established tradition work on people in the form of set habits and customary ways of thinking than on a writer who works under the greater pressures of new ideas and the urgent demands of modern life. (16)

Though there were three cultures, ultimately they got reduced to two. And straddling between two ‘rich’ cultures, Ramanujan does not think in terms of isolation exclusive terms as one culture becomes a ready critical frame for another. In “Take Care”, the poet concentrates on life in Chicago, but at the back of his mind his native landscape works as the reference point. Time and again he recalls the Kannada culture. Whenever he thinks of Kannada, he is reminded of

pepper grinders,
salt shakers, or the box of matches on the black and white squares of your kitchen cloth.
They take on the look of meat grinders, cement shakers,
boxes against boxes in the grilled
city. (104)
If the native landscape provided more time to stare, in Chicago he does not get any time to stare. “Take Care”, thus, takes care of the culture of both Chicago and Kannada. In a way the poem lends itself to a comparative study of cultures.

Ramanujan’s poetic consciousness shows Chicago in the foreground and Karnataka in the background in such a way that it disturbs the poet eternally. He feels uprooted and this uprootedness gives him a double voice or dialogical vision, a characteristic of postcolonial condition. In the poem “Waterfalls in a Bank”, for instance, one can see Ramanujan’s bi-focal vision.

And then one sometimes sees waterfalls

As the ancient Tamils saw them

Wavering snakeskins,

Cascades of muslin, sometimes

In the spray, living and dying children

Tumble towards old age (189)

Ramazani Jahan’s explanation on this relationship of waterfalls with snakeskin or muslin is relevant:

Ramanujan decommodifies and indianizes the Confined waterfall in an American Bank, Putting metaphor to work in a kind of reverse Colonization. The ancient Indian vehicles
of Snakes in and muslin paradoxically enliven With Danger
and wonder an image hackneyed in Western poetry (78)

In this poem, “Waterfalls in a Bank”, Ramanujan while looking at the waterfalls is suddenly reminded of a childhood image of Brahmin sadhu pissing in the open. Chicago waterfall and sadhu’s stream of urine bear parodic relationship. The poem reaches to its parodic climax when the poet lets the trajectory of sadhu’s urine gleam like a diamond in semi arc, in the light-beam of a car headlight thus:

As I hear the waters fall, the papers
rustle, and it’s evening: a paralytic sadhu,
tap dancer of the St. Vitu’s dance,
knocking his steps out on the pebbles
with no reflexes left in either knee,
.lifts with his one good finger
his loincloth, and pisses standing
like a horse on my childhood’s dark
sidestreet, aiming his stream
at two red flowers on the oleander bush,
as a car turns the corner.
Headlights make his arc
a trajectory of yellow diamonds,
.scared instant rainbows, ejecting spurts
of crystal, shocked

by the common place cruelty of headlights. (190)

In this poem, the poet describes a sadhu who is found urinating. This description denotes spiritual impoverishment. The poet underlines the fact that the absence of ethical values divides the east from the west. Equally, unless and until the west shows an inclination to enhance its morality, compatibility or convergence of the east and the west would become impossibility. There is always a dialogue between two spaces in his poetry. The native or the traditional is seen as a deep structure and the postmodernist features are observed as surface structure.

Employing indigenous oral narratives is highly challenging in Indian English poetry. To combat the challenge, the poet has appropriately made use of proverbs, riddles, rituals, myths, legends, vartakathas, jokes, lullabies and even epic-length narratives. In an interview given to Chirantan Kulshreshtha, Ramanujan holds that individual genres lose their individuality and identity in the context of portraying human world as befitting themes in a work of art. The poet states:

The more I pay attention to the human world, for me the line between the poem and the novel, the lyric and the story, begins to blur; and anyway in Indian poetry there’s never been a clear line. Any single poem implies a persona, a
voice, a specific scene, a whole dramatic situation. This is true of both the Tamil poems and the Sanskrit ones. (47)

Ramanujan recycled folk narratives into reasonable subtle structures of modern Indian English poetry which to a certain extent is fragmentary as he touches upon various themes and aspects.

In modern British poetry, particularly in the poetry of T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats, metaphors and similies related to Indian culture have been frequently employed as objective correlatives to express larger truths. The cultural imperatives used by a British or an American poet are very different from an Indian English poet doing the same. Since the Western scholar, does not have access to local unwritten literatures, canonical Sanskrit texts and icons are often consulted. The European author is not anxious to establish his credentials as an Indian poet or author. Rather, he aims at using multicultural mythological frame to achieve universality. Indian English writer has his own culture specific predicament. He has to negotiate the two worlds-the outer world that reduces culture to commodity, and the inner world which deals with the inherited landscape that foregrounds culture as an intrinsic part of the mental and moral make-up of the self. Even within the inherited space, he has to negotiate the highbrow and the lowbrow streams of Indian culture. Ramanujan takes an earnest effort to be an authentic ‘local’ Indian, and be acceptable to the English reader in general.
The poem “Convention of Despair” shows how he remains a
downright conventional Indian. Ramanujan does not look down upon on
what is considered as Western culture. At the same time he restricts
himself by avoiding undue adulation to anything and everything that is
considered Indian. But still it is impossible for him to adopt modern ways
of coming to terms with despair.

I cannot unlearn

conventions of despair.

They have their pride

I must seek and will find

my particular hell only in my Hindu mind

must translate and turn

till I blister and roast

for certain lives to come, ‘eye deep’,

in those Boiling Crates of Oil…. (34)

Getting an insight into the sensibility of the poetic self of
Ramanujan, one finds a fine link between his poetry and his psyche.
However, like the abandoned son whose eyes barely resemble his
father’s, the poetic self returns to its roots to get itself defined and
refined. But during his poetic journey into the past of India and the
present of the west, the different cultures take an effective
metamorphosis.
The poet begins with an experience usually having an Indian basis (if only the poetic self) or an Indian setting, the experience then becomes a voyage into language and so is moved outside its place of origin (the more ancestral the place, with a few if any roots In English, the more hazardous yet far reaching the Journey may be) then the experience and the expression Return in the form of the finished poems.

(S.C.Harrex 141)

In other words, both the experience and the expression emerge as finished products of art. The modern prescriptions for dealing with despair have no appeal to him. The inherent culture of a person is identified only by the way he comes to terms with grief. The survival techniques that one picks up in the formative years are found to help the individual. The decision to return to the hell “in my Hindu mind” refers to state of mind which faithfully records a complex of feelings in a given context. The context changes gives rise to another order of sensibility, tone and implication. Every incident has a place of significance even the relationship with those who are dead is not irrelevant. With the help of an active memory, the past is activated. And the interaction between the past and the present continues. Real events of the past are processed. They bring new meaning to the present memory which helps to retrieve details, reinterpret them, and rearrange them for the better understanding of the
present. As long as there is memory there is no lack or fear of a loss of connection. The poet lives in the inner and the outer world which is equally vivid and vital. It is because of memory, the co-existence and integration of both worlds becomes possible. Memory provides impetus for work and progress, and in these ways memory enables the artist to see life steadily and to see it whole.

“Farewell” is another poem which describes the constancy of self. The self desires to rejuvenate its relationship and it refuses to bid farewell. The poet asserts:

To this part of me
that turns and returns
with a different partner
in a square dance,
meeting before I begin to see,
seeing after I have done
with meeting,
squaring at last in a glimpse
the ancient circle
of you and me:

How can I say farewell
when farewells are made
only for people who stay
and only for people who go away? (22)

The self assumes a number of roles with reference to persons who are near and dear or with reference to people who are strange and unrelated. Besides, the self also changes into various colours due to shift in the space provided to it. Thus, the self-manifests plurality pertaining to space, time and people. As the self keeps changing its mask, it experiences grief. Theologian John S. Dunne, likewise, believes that the shift from attitude to attitude, state to state identity to identity points out the mystery of the self:

The search from person to person involved in the process of passing over from standpoint to standpoint reveals each person as inexhaustible, incapable of being reduced to a single standpoint or to any sum of standpoints. (22)

In Ramanujans’s poetry, the self enters into several roles in order to establish its inexhaustible potential nature. It denotes a positive state of being which gives the self the required freedom and transparence to stretch subjective and linear time. The self uses different personae. It vividly brings into focus its multiple relationships with the assistance of memory and time. The self shows the capacity to emerge even as an object to observe itself.
The poem “Self Portrait” can be taken for analysis. The whole poem is deceptive in nature because, the self appears to be insufficient and uncertain. It is highly susceptible to external forces, on account of which, the self looks alien to its own viewer.

I resemble everyone

but myself, and sometimes see

in shop-windows, (23)

The poem is vital for understanding Ramanujan's poetry. W.B.Yeats is of the opinion that, in the middle Ages and in the age of Renaissance, man showed interest in considering Christ or some classical hero as their role model to discover a desirable pattern of life. But the modern man turns no more to an external body to discover his persona. He looks at the mirror and discovers his self. A journey into the self helps him feel that the persona exhibits different attitudes according to the nature of reality. And in truth, these different identities are different points of view that he takes up in his life.

The poem “Self Portrait” illustrates the eagerness or curiosity of a modern man to pitch or plot a graph of his life which resembles others over a period of indeterminate time. The self and Ramanujan never takes pride in exhibiting unity or synthesis. On the contrary, it gloats over its power of diffusion and disintegration. The self perpetuates experiences galore. The process of reflection leads to multiplication of several selves.
Mirrors in a mirror shop
break me up into how many I was
show me in profile and fragments(216)

The poet realises that each fragments self contains the properties of
characters that he comes across in his life and in to a single self presents a
collage of many people that he observed in his life. Therefore, he
questions

Whose head I have whose nose
how tall how old my hair
how black my shoes how red (216)

The self is a fantastic and fabulous combination of different spaces
and times. It is

Like clocks in the clock shop
quartz digital grandfather and micky
mouse each showing a different
time all at once (216)

“grandfather” and “mickey mouse” signify the fabric of India and
Chicago respectively. Grandfather represents time past. Mickey mouse
stands for virtual time. As an Indo-American poet, Ramanujan, straddles
two cultures and two periods of time, the distant past and the virtual
present.
In “A Mediation,” the poet grows all the more “aware of the multiple bodies and centers of consciousness into which he has been split, processed, and distributed.”(Dharwadker xxi). The multiple come together and finally reflect upon each other in such a way that there is no integrity of the self. Hence he says:

I know I’m writing now on my head,

now on my torso, my living

hands moving

on a dead one, a firm imagined body

working with the transience

of breathless

real bodies. (240)

In the poems of Ramanujan, the dead interact with the living. Similarly, the imaginary self communes with the real and finally results in self-reflexivity. Meditation thus involves the winding and the unwinding nature of self.

The self is never coherent. It has an in-built dual structure. And the predicament of human self is that one always experiences the feeling of ‘the other’. The poet states:

This body I sometimes call me,

sometimes mine

as if I’m someone else
owing and informing this body
that affects me most when it affects
another by look….

A momentary legend, a mythic
beast with two backs,
mammal and quadruped, even
a four-armed androgyny like our god
who used to be everywhere but is now housed
in the kitchen, (209)

The poet imagines himself to be a “mythic man with two backs”. He appears to be a mix of “mammal and a quadruped”. And he is a “four-armed androgyny”. The self is seen as two persons with their back to each other. The self is said to be a creature part animal, and part man, half-man and half-woman. These dualities of different types reduce the uniqueness of the self into a laughable absurd caricature. This dual self which is omnipresent is now housed in the kitchen.

”The Watchers” is another poem by Ramanujan which begins with,

Lighter than light, blowing like air
through keyholes, they watch without questions,
the watchers
they watch even the questions, as I live
over and over with cancelled stamps,
in verandas,
ponas, bus burnings, chicagos
near a backyard well of India
smelly basements,
small backrooms, upstairs, downstairs,
once even under the stairs
on election day,
with a dog who groaned human in his sleep
and barked at spiders. (137)

The poet presents two worlds; one of the persona and the other of
the watchers, the one is known for its rich experiences and the other
refers to a mere sight of things. There seems to exist a distinction between
these two worlds. But when we come to the last line, it becomes clear that
both the worlds have become one in terms of being impotent. Living in
“Poonas”, “Chicagos”, ”upstairs”, “downstairs”, “under the stairs” and
experiencing “bus burnings”, and awful “smells”. The persona does not
protest. It is quite evident that such types of personae exist for

They impose nothing, take no positions
it’s the mark of superior beings;
says the Book
of changes, they can watch a game of chess
silently. Or, for that matter,
a Chinese wall
cemented with the bonemeal of friends
and enemies. Unwitting witnesses,
impotence
their supreme virtue,
they move only their eyes,
and all things seem to find their form.
Meer seers
they make the scene. (134)

Acquiring the virtue of “impotence” like the watchers who “impose nothing, take no positions” and who can “watch a game of chess silently” or “a chinese wall”, the persona remains passive. The poem thus, enacts what Dharwadker calls a “double movement” between fragmentation and unity (37), suggesting that this double movement presents unity in diversity. In addition to that, it expresses the inter connectivity of India.

Ramanujan’s relation with the past and his attempt to seek freedom from it maybe compared to Albert Camus who differentiates the concept of freedom from the concept of absurdity.

Before encountering the absurd, the everyday man lives with aims a concern for the future…He weighs his chances, he counts on “someday”, his retirement or the labour of his sons. He still thinks that something in his life can be
directed. In truth, he acts as if he were free, even if all the facts make a point of contradicting that liberty. But after the absurd, everything is upset…the absurd man realizes that hitherto he was bound to that postulate of freedom on the illusion of which he was living…. The extent to which he imagined a purpose to be achieved and became the slave of his liberty… (56)

Contextually Ramanujan’s poem is different from that of the observation made by Camus. But with regard to the contradiction of attitude between the illusory hopefulness of an ordinary man and the conscious alienation of the absurd man, Ramanujan falls in line with Camus. Ramanujan questions the meaning of illusion and reality. The protagonist of the poem ‘It Does not Follow, but When in the Street’ combines these two attitudes:

Yellow trees bend over broken glass
and the walls of Central jail
drip with spring \’s laburnum
yellow, yellow on yellow,
I forget the eczema on my feet,
the two holes in my shoe: at once I know
I’Il have a sharp and gentle daughter,
an old age somewhere; I walk on air,
I walk on water, can even bear

to walk on earth for my wife

and I will someday somehow share (57)

The hope that he would ‘someday, somehow share a language’ and the awareness that he can walk on air, walk on water, but perhaps, not on earth trouble him a lot. The poet is concerned about his inability to release him from the strong pull of his past on him. At the same time, he desires to keep everything in order. The social responsibility of any poet is that he has to focus on the continuity of human life for the welfare of the people. The people or the readers of a work of art have to bear in mind that it is the past which decides the present and forecasts the future. And only when the base is strong, the other two edifices can be a thought of. Ramanujan’s poetry is seriously reviewed by Devindra Kohli who says that there are not memorable things in life. There is hardly anything romantic or nostalgic about his memory which entails unpleasant scenes like deaths, accidents etc. Therefore Ramanujan systematizes the thought process of memory in order to bring relief to him.

Once a man understands the reality of life and also about occurrences which are unavoidable, there will not be any fear. Apart from memory and the inevitable nature of past, Ramanujan discusses his dilemma between tradition and modernity. The poet’s Brahmin ancestry prevents him from falling a prey to the allure of the Western culture.
Ramanujan’s “Looking for a cousin on a Swing” challenges the duality of mind and the body. Modern Western phenomenological approach affirms that it is through the body that an individual understand other people. Ramanujan establishes the truth in the poem.

The true course of love never runs smooth. Love has ups and downs, flights and drops. The swing image in the poem reveals the love-hate relationship between him and his cousin. Similarly, Ramanujan’s love poems which are dedicated to his wife propound detachment and attachment that a male has towards his chosen female. Both are cousins. Yet they do not have a shared childhood which leads to alienation. But the man succeeds in bridging the gap between them. In “Love Poem for a Wife I” the husband-wife relationship revolves round an estrangement between two.

But the mood of irony and bitterness disappear in his second love poem bridging the emotional and cultural gap between himself and his wife using his wit and wisdom. ‘Still Another View of Grace’ is a poem which reconciles the incompatibility of the two. He is a Tamil Brahmin and his wife a typical Keralite Christian. This incompatibility gives rise to complexity which is resolved satisfactorily in the end.

In poem after poem Ramanujan goes back to his childhood memories and experiences in South India. From personal experience, the poet constantly moves to a depiction of shared or collective experience.
S. Nagarajan describes the relationship between memory and the poet’s personal emotion.

Most of the poems in the new volume, as in the first, have their origin in recollected personal emotion. They deal with the poet’s memory of his Relations and the ambiguous freedom that life away from them confers. (18)

Prof. K. Raghavendra Rao has also discovered romanticism in the poetry of Ramanujan. He has also pointed out noticed relation between Ramanujan’s poetry and memory. He writes:

One can go labouring to the point that memory serves as the basis of Ramanujan’s reverse romanticism in his first collection of poems. But memory can be understood as time framed in, as subjective context or time framed in the objective, cultural and historical context. In some poems the one dominates and in some the other. (124)

Memory forms the basis of Ramanujan’s poetry. Whether it is subjective or psychological memory creates an interesting pattern of emotion in his poetry. He carries his past with him as an inner world of memories and while stepping into the world of the present he transfigures his anxiety and fear about the future into new insights.

Talking of the role played by memory in Ramanujan’s poetry Dr. Naik observes:
Furthermore, it is not ‘emotion recollected in tranquility’, but recollection emotionalized in un-tranquil moments that appears to be the driving force behind much of Ramanujan’s poetry. (15)

It is difficult for Ramanujan to connect both the worlds the Eastern and the Western, the land of his birth and the place of his work and residence. He fumbles, stumbles, but refuses to give up one for the other. In his poem “Waterfalls in a Bank”, he states:

As I transact with the past as with another

country with its own customs, currency

stock exchange, always

at a loss when I could my change: (189)

Reality threatens him. But he tries to assuage its severity aesthetically. In the title poem of his latest volume “Second Sight” he concludes:

I fumble in my nine

pockets like the night-blind

son-in-law groping

in every room for his wife

and strike a light to regain

at once my first and only
sight. (191)

Ramanujan is preoccupied with the Indian literature, both written and oral. It has also been a guiding factor in determining the course of his own poetry. But the United States, his working place creates a tension in him. As he belongs to two hemispheres, he struggles hard to keep him afoot.

Although Ramanujan stayed away from his land, he carried the Hindu culture with him. And he constantly did research in the field which ultimately shaped his sensibility. He is one of those rare poets in whom scholarship and creativity co-exist wonderfully. Critics state that Ramanujan did have the digestive power of an ostrich, which helped him assimilate all sources of his poetry without any ostentation. In poems like “Farewell” and “Lying” the two opposite worlds are held in contrast. But at the end his ancestral world emerges as victorious. Similarly love triumphs in his poems. And the poet feels proud to showcase the enduring filial relationship which survives against all odds.

Eyes alternately blue, green, grey,
or brown as the lake.
Ears pink, whorls of sea shells
held up to the sun.
And so on.
Yet this beauty throws pots and pans
whenever she’s in a range.

Does not wake up till noon, does not
wash between her legs and her ruby lips
open only
to speak unspeakable obscenities. (16)

Or in this:

She told the man in her bed,
he was the best lover she’d ever had,
and he told her she was beautiful.
all his life bastard son wet his bed.
The father told the boy
his incontinent dog was going
to the hospital,
not to the animal shelter
to be put to sleep. (26)

Ramanujan’s Hindu world is a world of clairvoyance, of oracular insight, of reaching out to the stage of conception where “fingers and toes not yet formed”. In “Twenty-four Senses” we have

Hindus speak of twenty-four senses.

We have eyes and eyes behind eyes.

Skin sometimes can see lightnings,
eyebrows hear the snake’s silence
bare feet taste the moss in the pons.

Turning somersaults, the liver watches
the circulation of cells, the pancreas
open into a swirl of faces, the ovaries moving
in whalesongs in the middle of the Atlantic. (6)

Ramanujan hovers between two lands-land of his birth and the
country of his work and domicile and he accepts both and does not
abandon one for the other. This aspect of his poetry may be considered
with T.S. Eliot who after accepting British citizenship in 1927 harked
back to his American past. In his Four Quarters place names have been
taken from U.S.A. and an attempt has been made to bring the past alive in
the present, so that an integrating vision of life could be envisaged cutting
across countries and continents. Bruce King emphasizes Ramanujan’s
attempt at integrating two modes of experience in the following passage:

His English-language poetry incorporates and assimilates
Linguistic, literacy and cultural features of Kannada and
Tamil into the linguistic, literacy and cultural forms of
modern American, British and European literature. Indian
sources and influences produce a poetry which has many of
its psychological roots in Indian cultural traditions but which
have been westernized modernized, internationalized. But
this is perhaps a western, developmental way of looking at
the process. Another way is to see Indian absorbing and taking over the alien somewhat like house in “Smallscale Reflection on a Great House”, a poem which itself absorbs a western model to express a supposedly Indian way of being.

(102)

Ramanujan’s poetry emanates from his desire to come to terms with himself against the background of expatriation and alienation from his native land. If the knowledge derived from experience and the knowledge which imposes a pattern go together, then there is little to fear, for Ramanujan’s poetry has blended together the message and the medium in harmonious whole. Like all great poets Ramanujan becomes the unity of his work, and the voice that speaks through his poetry is controlled, submerged ‘looking before and after’.